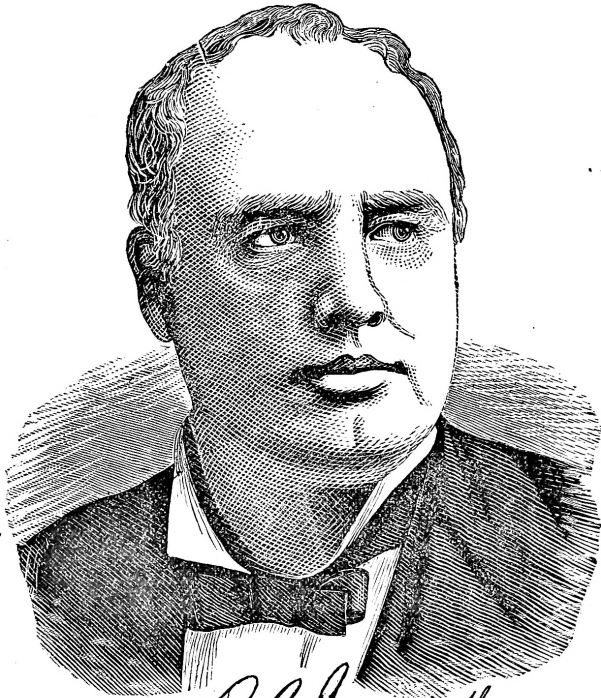


NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

THE
CLERGY & COMMON SENSE

BY COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL.



R. G. Ingersoll

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THE CLERGY AND COMMON SENSE.

THE *Brooklyn Union* has interviewed Robert G. Ingersoll, who criticises the *Union's* recent interviews with clergymen. He is at Long Beach, and having been shown back numbers of the *Union* containing articles by clergymen, who have almost unanimously declared that the Church is suffering very little from the scepticism of the day, and that the influence of the scientific writers, whose opinions are regarded as Atheistic or infidel, is not great, and that the books of such writers are not read as much as some people think they are, was asked, "What is your opinion with regard to the subject?" Colonel Ingersoll said:

It is natural for a man to defend his business, to stand by his class, his caste, his creed. And I suppose this accounts for the ministers all saying that infidelity is not on the increase. Only a few years ago science was superstition's hired man. The scientific men apologised for every fact they happened to find. With hat in hand they begged pardon of the parson for finding a fossil, and asked the forgiveness of God for making any discovery in nature. Now religion is taking off its hat to science. Humboldt stands higher than all the apostles. Darwin has done more to change human thought than all the priests who have existed. Where there was one infidel twenty-five years ago there are one hundred now.

"The ministers say, I believe, Colonel, that worldliness is the greatest foe to the Church, and admit that it is on the increase."

What is worldliness? I suppose worldliness consists in paying attention to the affairs of this world:

getting enjoyment out of this life; gratifying the senses, giving the ears music, the eyes painting and sculpture, the palate good food; cultivating the imagination; playing games of skill and chance; adorning the person; developing the body, enriching the mind; investigating the facts by which we are surrounded; building homes, rocking cradles; thinking, working, inventing, buying, selling, hoping. All this, I suppose, is worldliness. These worldly people have cleared the forests, ploughed the land, built the cities, the steamships, the telegraphs, and have produced all there is of worth and wonder in the world. Yet the preachers denounce them. Were it not for worldly people, how would the preachers get along? Who would build the churches? Who would fill the contribution boxes and plates, and who (most serious of all questions) would pay the salaries? I believe in the new firm of Health and Heresy rather than the old partnership of Disease and Divinity, doing business at the old sign of the Skull and Crossbones. Some of the ministers that you have interviewed, or at least one of them, tells us the cure for worldliness. He says that God is sending fires, and cyclones, and things of that character, for the purpose of making people spiritual; of calling their attention to the fact that everything in this world is of a transitory nature. The clergy have always had great faith in famine, in affliction, in pestilence. They know that a man is a thousand times more apt to thank God for a crust or a crumb than for a banquet. They know that prosperity has the same effect on the average Christian that thick soup has, according to Bumble, on the English pauper—"it makes 'em impudent." The devil made a mistake in not doubling Job's property, instead of leaving him a pauper. In prosperity the ministers think we forget death and are too happy. In the arms of those we love, the dogma of eternal fire is for the moment forgotten. According to the ministers, God kills our children in order that we may not forget him. They imagine that the man who goes into Dakota, cultivates the soil, and rears for himself a little home, is getting

too "worldly"; and so God starts a cyclone to scatter his home and the limbs of his wife and children upon the desolate plains, and the ministers of Brooklyn say this is done because we are getting too "worldly." They think we should be more "spiritual"; that is to say, willing to live upon the labor of others, willing to ask alms, saying in the meantime, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." If this is so, why not give the money back? "Spiritual" people are those who eat oatmeal and prunes, have great confidence in dried apples, read Cowper's *Task*, and Pollock's *Course of Time*, laugh at the jokes in *Harper's Monthly*, wear clothes shiny at the knees and elbows, and call all that has elevated the world "beggarly elements."

"You have stated your objections to the churches—what would you have to take their place?"

There was a time when men had to meet together for the purpose of being told the law. This was before printing, and for hundreds and hundreds of years most people depended for their information on what they heard. The ear was the avenue to the brain. There was a time, of course, when Freemasonry was necessary, so that a man could carry, not only all over his own country, but to another, a certificate that he was a gentleman; that he was an honest man. There was a time, and it was necessary, for the people to assemble. They had no books, no papers, no way of reaching each other. But now all that is changed. The daily press gives you the happenings of the world. The libraries give you the thoughts of the greatest and best. Every family of moderate means can command the principal sources of information. There is no necessity for going to the Church and hearing the same story for ever. Let the minister write what he wishes to say. Let him publish it. If it is worth buying, people will read it. It is hardly fair to get them in a Church in the name of duty, and then inflict upon them a sermon that under no circumstances they would read.

I do not think the ministers of to-day more intel-

lectual than they were a hundred years ago ; that is, I do not think they have greater brain capacity, but I think, on the average, the congregations have a higher amount. The amelioration of orthodox Christianity is not by the intelligence in the pulpit, but by the brain in the pews. Another thing : One hundred years ago the Church had intellectual honors to bestow. The pulpit opened a career. Not so now. There are too many avenues to distinction and wealth—too much “worldliness.” The best minds do not go into the pulpit. Martyrs would rather be burnt than laughed at. Most ministers of to-day are not naturally adapted to other professions promising eminence. There are some great exceptions, but these exceptions are the ministers nearest infidels. Theodore Parker was a great man. Henry Ward Beecher is a great man—not the most consistent man in the world—but he is certainly a man of mark—a remarkable genius.*

“How would you convey moral instruction from youth up, and what kind of instruction would you give?”

I regard Christianity as a failure. Now, then, what is Christianity? I do not include in the word “Christianity” the average morality of the world, or the morality taught in all systems of religion—that is, as distinctive Christianity. Christianity is this: A belief in the inspiration of the scriptures, the atonement, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, an eternal reward for the believers in Christ and eternal punishment for the rest of us. Now, take from Christianity its miracles, its absurdities of the atonement and fall of man, and the inspiration of the scriptures, and I have no objection to it as I understand it. I believe, in the main, in the Christianity which I suppose Christ taught—that is, in kindness, gentleness, forgiveness. I do not believe in loving enemies ; I have pretty hard work to love my friends. Neither do I believe in revenge. No man can afford to keep the viper of revenge in his heart. But I

* This was said in 1883, before Beecher's death.

believe in justice, in self-defence. Christianity—that is, the miraculous part—must be abandoned. As to morality—morality is born of the instinct of self-preservation. If man could not suffer, the word “conscience” never would have passed his lips. Self-preservation makes larceny a crime. Murder will be regarded as a bad thing as long as a majority object to being murdered. Morality does not come from the clouds; it is born of human want and human experience.

“The shorter catechism, Colonel, you may remember, says that ‘man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.’ What is your idea of the chief end of man?”

It has always seemed a little curious to me that joy should be held in such contempt here, and yet promised hereafter as an eternal reward? Why not be happy here, as well as in heaven? Why not have joy here? Why not go to heaven now—that is to-day? Why not enjoy the sunshine of this world, and all there is of good in it? It is bad enough; so bad that I do not believe that it was ever created by a beneficent Deity; but what little good there is in it, why not have it? Neither do I believe that it is the end of man to glorify God. How can the infinite be glorified? Does he wish for reputation? He has no equals, no superiors. How can he have what we call reputation? How can he achieve what we call glory? Why should he wish the flattery of the average Presbyterian? What good will it do him to know that his course has been approved of by the Methodist Episcopal Church? What does he care, even, for the religious weeklies, or the presidents of religious colleges? I do not see how we can help God or hurt him. If there be an infinite being, certainly nothing we can do can in any way affect him. We can affect each other, and therefore man should be careful not to sin against man. For that reason I have said, a hundred times, injustice is the only blasphemy. If there be a heaven, I want to associate there with the ones who had loved me here. I might not like the angels, and the angels might not

like me. I want to find old friends. I do not care to associate with the infinite ; there could be no freedom in such society. I suppose I am not "spiritual" enough, and am somewhat touched with "worldliness." It seems to me that everybody ought to be honest enough to say about the infinite, "I know nothing" ; of eternal joy, "I have no conception" ; about another world, "I have no information." At the same time I am not attacking anybody for believing in immortality. The more a man can hope, and the less he can fear, the better. I have done what I could to drive from the human heart the shadow of eternal pain. I want to put out the fires of an ignorant and revengeful hell.

In response to the reporter's query as to the progress made in theology, Colonel Ingersoll said:—

By comparing long periods of time, it is very easy to see the progress that has been made. Only a few years ago men who are now considered quite orthodox would have been imprisoned, or at least mobbed, for heresy. Only a few years ago men like Huxley and Tyndall and Spencer and Darwin and Humboldt would have been considered as the most infamous of monsters. At that time every scientific discovery was something to be pardoned. Moses was authority in geology, and Joshua was considered the first astronomer in the world. Now, everything has changed, and everybody knows it except the clergy. Religion is finding out new meanings for old texts. We are told that God spoke in the language of the common people ; that he was not teaching any science ; that he allowed his children not only to remain in error, but kept them there. It is now admitted that the Bible is no authority on any question of natural fact ; it is inspired only in morality, in a spiritual way. All, except the Brooklyn ministers, see that the Bible has ceased to be regarded as authority. Nobody appeals to a passage to settle a dispute of fact. The most intellectual men of the world laugh at the idea of inspiration. Men of the greatest reputations hold all supernaturalism in contempt. Millions of people are reading the opinions of

men who combat and deny the foundation of orthodox Christianity. I can remember when I would be the only infidel in the town. Now I meet them thick as autumn leaves ; they are everywhere. In all the professions, trades, and employments the orthodox creeds are despised. They are not simply disbelieved ; they are execrated. They are regarded, not with indifference, but with passionate hatred. Thousands and hundreds of thousands of mechanics in this country abhor orthodox Christianity. Millions of educated men hold in immeasurable contempt the doctrine of eternal punishment. The doctrine of atonement is regarded as absurd by millions. So with the dogma of imputed guilt, vicarious virtue, and vicarious vice. I see that the Rev. Dr. Eddy advises ministers not to answer the arguments of infidels in the pulpit, and gives this wonderful reason : That the hearers will get more doubts from the answer than from reading the original arguments. So the Rev. Dr. Hawkins admits that he cannot defend Christianity from infidelity without creating more infidelity. So the Rev. Dr. Haynes admits that he cannot answer the theories of Robertson Smith in popular addresses. The only minister who feels absolutely safe on the subject, as far as his congregation is concerned, seems to be the Rev. Joseph Pullman. He declares that the young people in his church don't know enough to have intelligent doubts, and that the old people are substantially in the same condition. Mr. Pullman feels that he is behind a breastwork so strong that other defence is unnecessary. So the Rev. Mr. Foote thinks that infidelity should never be refuted in the pulpit. I admit that it has never been successfully done, but I did not suppose so many ministers admitted the impossibility. Mr. Foote is opposed to all public discussion. Dr. Wells tells us that scientific Atheism should be ignored ; that it should not be spoken of in the pulpit. The Rev. Dr. Van Dyke has the same feeling of security enjoyed by Dr. Pullman, and he declares that the great majority of Christian people of to-day know nothing about current infidel theories. His idea is to let them remain in ignorance ; hat it would be dangerous for the Christian minister

even to state the position of the infidel; that after stating it, he might not, even with the help of God, successfully combat the theory. These ministers do not agree. Dr. Carpenter accounts for infidelity by nicotine in the blood. It is all smoke. He thinks the blood of the human family has deteriorated. He thinks the Church is safe because the Christians read. He differs with his brothers Pullman and Van Dyke. So the Rev. George E. Reed believes that infidelity should be discussed in the pulpit. He has more confidence in his general and in the weapons of his warfare than some of his brethren. His confidence may arise from the fact that he never had a discussion. The Rev. Dr. McLelland thinks the remedy is to stick by the Catechism; that there is not now enough of authority; not enough of brute force; thinks that the family, the Church, and the State, ought to use the rod; that the rod is the salvation of the world; that the rod is a divine institution; that fathers ought to have it for their children; that mothers ought to use it. This is part of the religion of universal love. The man who cannot raise children without whipping them ought not to have them. The man who would mar the flesh of a boy or girl is unfit to have the control of a human being. The father who keeps a rod in his house keeps a relic of barbarism in his heart. There is nothing reformatory in punishment; nothing reformatory in fear. Kindness, guided by intelligence, is the only reforming force. An appeal to brute force is an abandonment of love and reason, and puts father and child upon a savage equality. The savageness in the heart of the father prompting the use of the rod or club produces a like savageness in the victim. The old idea that a child's spirit must be broken is infamous. All this is passing away, however, with orthodox Christianity. That children are treated better than formerly shows conclusively the increase of what is called infidelity. Infidelity has always been a protest against tyranny in the State, against intolerance in the Church, against barbarism in the family. It has always been an appeal for light, for justice, for universal kindness and tenderness.

“The ministers say, I believe, Colonel, that worldliness is the greatest foe to the Church, and admit that it is on the increase?”

It is the habit of ministers to belittle the men who support them—to slander the spirit by which they live. “It is as though the mouth should tear the hand that feeds it.” The nobility of the Old World hold the honest working man in contempt, and yet are so contemptible themselves that they are willing to live upon his labor. And so the minister, pretending to be spiritual—pretending to be a spiritual guide—looks with contempt upon men who make it possible for him to live. It may be said by “worldliness” they only mean enjoyment—that is, hearing music, going to the theatre and the opera, taking a Sunday excursion to the silvery margin of the sea. Of course, ministers look upon theatres as rival attractions, and most of their hatred is born of business views. They think people ought to be driven to church by having all other places closed. In my judgment, the theatre has done good, while the Church has done harm. The drama never has insisted upon burning anybody. Persecution is not born of the stage. On the contrary, upon the stage has for ever been found impersonations of patriotism, heroism, courage, fortitude, and justice, and these impersonations have always been applauded, and have been represented that they might be applauded. In the pulpit hypocrites have been worshipped; upon the stage they have been held up to derision and execration. Shakespeare has done far more for the world than the Bible. The ministers keep talking about spirituality as opposed to worldliness. Nothing can be more absurd than this talk about spirituality. As though readers of the Bible, repeaters of texts, and sayers of prayers were engaged in a higher work than honest industry. Is there anything higher than human love? A man is in love with a girl, and he has determined to work for her and to give his life that she may have a life of joy. Is there anything more spiritual than that—anything higher? They marry. He clears some land. He fences a field.

He builds a cabin; and she, of this hovel, makes a happy home. She plants flowers, puts a few simple things of beauty upon the walls. This is what the preachers call "worldliness." Is there anything more spiritual? In a little while, in this cabin, in this home, is heard the drowsy rhythm of the cradle's rock, while softly floats the lullaby upon the twilight air. Is there anything more spiritual, is there anything more infinitely tender, than to see husband and wife bending with clasped hands over a cradle, gazing upon the dimpled miracle of love? I say that it is spiritual to work for those you love. Spiritual to improve the physical condition of mankind—for he who improves the physical condition improves the mental. I believe in the ploughs instead of the prayers.

"Some of the clergymen who have been interviewed admit that the rich and the poor no longer meet together, and deprecate the establishment of mission chapels in connection with the large and fashionable churches."

The early Christians supposed that the end of the world was at hand. They were all sitting on the dock waiting for the ship. In the presence of such a belief, what are known as class distinctions could not easily exist. Most of them were exceedingly poor, and poverty is a bond of union. As a rule, people are hospitable in the proportion that they lack wealth. In old times, in the West, a stranger was always welcome. He took, in part, the place of the newspaper. He was a messenger from the older parts of the country. Life was monotonous. The appearance of the traveller gave variety. As people grow wealthy they grow exclusive. As they become educated there is a tendency to pick their society. It is the same in the Church. The Church no longer believes the creed, no longer acts as though the creed were true. If the rich man regarded the sermon as a means of grace, as a kind of rope thrown by the minister to a man just above the falls; if he regarded it as a lifeboat, or as a lighthouse, he would not allow his coachman to remain outside. If

he really believed that the coachman had an immortal soul, capable of eternal joy, liable to everlasting pain, he would do his utmost to make the calling and election of the said coachman sure. As a matter of fact, the rich man now cares but little for servants. They are not included in the scheme of salvation, except as a kind of job lot. The Church has become a club. It is a social affair, and the rich don't care to associate in the week days with the poor they may happen to meet at Church. As they expect to be in heaven together for ever, they can afford to be separated here. There will certainly be time enough there to get acquainted. Another thing is the magnificence of the churches. The Church depends absolutely upon the rich. Poor people feel out of place in such magnificent buildings. They drop into the nearest seat; like poor relations, they sit on the extreme edge of the chair. At the table of Christ they are below the salt. They are constantly humiliated. When subscriptions are asked for they feel ashamed to have their mite compared with the thousands given by the millionaire. Their pennies feel ashamed to mingle with the silver in the contribution plate. The result is that most of them avoid the Church. It costs too much to worship God in public. Good clothes are necessary, fashionably cut. The poor come in contact with too much silk, too many jewels, too many evidences of what is generally assumed to be superiority.

“Would this state of affairs be remedied if, instead of Churches, we had societies of ethical culture? Would not the rich there predominate and the poor be just as much out of place?”

I think the effect would be precisely the same, no matter what the society is, what object it has, if composed of rich and poor. Class distinctions, to a greater or less extent, will creep in—in fact they do not have to creep in. They are there at the commencement, and they are born of the different conditions of the members.

These class distinctions are not always made by men of wealth. For instance, some men obtain money,

and are what we call snobs. Others obtain it and retain their democratic principles, and meet men according to the law of affinity, or general intelligence, on intellectual grounds, for instance.

There is not only the distinction which is produced by wealth and power, but there are also the distinctions which are born of intelligence, of culture, of character, of end, object, aim in life. No one can blame an honest mechanic for holding a wealthy snob in utter contempt. Neither can any one blame respectable poverty for declining to associate with arrogant wealth. The right to make the distinction is with all classes, and with the individuals of all classes. It is impossible to have any society for any purpose—that is, where they meet together—without certain embarrassments being produced by these distinctions. Now, for instance, suppose there should be a society simply of intelligent and cultured people. Their wealth, to a great degree, would be disregarded. But, after all, the distinction that intelligence draws between talent and genius is as marked and cruel as was ever drawn between poverty and wealth. Wherever the accomplishment of some object is deemed of such vast importance that, for the moment, all minor distinctions are forgotten, then it is possible for the rich and poor, the ignorant and intelligent, to act in concert. This happens in political parties, in time of war, and it has also happened whenever a new religion has been founded. Whenever the rich wish the assistance of the poor, distinctions are forgotten. It is upon the same principle that we gave liberty to the slave during the civil war, and clad him in the uniform of the nation; we wanted him, we needed him; and, for the time, we were perfectly willing to forget the distinction of color. Common peril produces pure democracy. It is with societies as with individuals. A poor young man coming to New York, bent upon making his fortune, begins to talk about the old fogies; holds in contempt many of the rules and regulations of the trade; is loud in his denunciation of monopoly; wants competition; shouts for fair play, and is a real democrat. But let him succeed; let him have a palace upon Fifth Avenue,

with his monogram on spoons and coaches ; then, instead of shouting for liberty, he will call for more police. He will then say, "We want protection ; the rabble must be put down." We have an aristocracy of wealth ; in some parts of our country an aristocracy of literature—men and women who imagine themselves writers and who hold in contempt all people who cannot express commonplaces in the most elegant diction ; people who look upon a mistake in grammar as far worse than a crime. So, in some communities, we have an aristocracy of muscle. The only true aristocracy, probably, is that of kindness. Intellect without heart is infinitely cruel ; as cruel as wealth without a sense of justice ; as cruel as muscle without mercy. So that, after all, the real aristocracy must be that of goodness where the intellect is directed by the heart.

"You say that the aristocracy of intellect is quite as cruel as the aristocracy of wealth—what do you mean by that ?"

By intellect, I mean simply intellect ; that is to say, the aristocracy of education—of simple brain—expressed in innumerable ways—in invention, painting, sculpture, literature. And I meant to say that that aristocracy was as cruel as that of simple arrogant wealth. After all, why should a man be proud of something given him by nature ; something that he did not earn, did not produce ; something that he could not help. Is it not more reasonable to be proud of wealth, which you have accumulated, than of brain which nature gave you ? And, to carry this idea clear out, why should we be proud of anything ? Is there any proper occasion on which to crow ? If you succeed, your success crows for you ; if you fail, certainly crowing is not in the best of taste. And why should man be proud of brain ? Why should he be proud of disposition or of good acts ?

"You speak of the cruelty of the intellect, and yet, of course, you must recognise the right of everyone to select his own companions. Would it be arrogant for

the intellectual man to prefer the companionship of people of his own class in preference to commonplace and unintelligent persons?"

All men should have the same rights, and one right that every man should have is to associate with congenial people. There are thousands of good men whose society I do not covet. They may be stupid, or they may be stupid only in the direction in which I am interested, and may be exceedingly intelligent as to matters about which I care nothing. In either case they are not congenial. They have the right to select congenial company; so have I. And while distinctions are thus made, they are not cruel; they are not heartless. They are for the good of all concerned, spring naturally from the circumstances, and are consistent with the highest philanthropy. Why we notice these distinctions in the Church more than we do in the club is that the Church talks one way and acts another; because the Church insists that a certain line of conduct is essential to salvation, and that every human being is in danger of eternal pain. If the creed were true, then, in the presence of such an infinite variety, all earthly distinctions should instantly vanish. Every Christian should exert himself for the salvation of the soul of a beggar with the same degree of earnestness that he would show to save a king. The accidents of wealth, education, social position, should be esteemed as naught, and the richest should gladly work side by side with the poorest. The churches will never reach the poor as long as they sell pews; so long as the rich members wear their best clothes on Sunday. As long as the fashions of the drawing-room are taken to the table of the Last Supper, the poor will remain in the highways and hedges. Present fashion is more powerful than faith. So long as the ministers shut up their churches and allow the poor to go to hell in summer; as long as they leave the Devil without a competitor for three months in the year, the churches will not materially impede the march of human progress. People, often unconsciously and without malice, say something or do something that throws an unex-

pected light upon a question. The other day, in one of the New York comic papers, there was a picture representing the foremost preachers of the country at the seaside together. It was regarded as a joke that they could enjoy each other's society. These ministers are supposed to be the apostles of the religion of kindness. They tell us to love even our enemies, and yet the idea that they could associate happily together is regarded as a joke! After all, churches are like other institutions—they have to be managed, and they now rely upon music and open elocution rather than upon the Gospel. They are becoming social affairs. They are giving up the doctrine of eternal punishment, and have consequently lost their hold. The orthodox Churches used to tell us there was going to be a fire, and they offered to insure; and as long as the fire was expected the premiums were paid and the policies were issued. Then came the Universalist Church, saying that there would be no fire, and yet asking the people to insure. For such a church there is no basis. It undoubtedly did good by its influence upon other churches. So with the Unitarian. That Church has no basis for organisation; no reason, because no hell is threatened, and heaven is but faintly promised. Just as the Churches have lost their belief in eternal fire, they have lost their influence, and the reason they have lost their belief is on account of the diffusion of knowledge. That doctrine is becoming absurd and infamous. Intelligent people are ashamed to broach it. Intelligent people can no longer believe it. It is regarded with horror, and the Churches must finally abandon it, and when they do that is the end of the church militant.

“What do you say to the progress of the Roman Catholic Church, in view of the fact that they have not changed their belief, in any particular, in regard to future punishment?”

Neither Catholicism nor Protestantism will ever win another battle. The last victory of Protestantism was won in Holland. Nations have not been converted

since then. The time has passed to preach with sword and gun, and for that reason Catholicism can win no more victories. That Church increases in this country mostly from immigration. Catholicism does not belong to the New World. It is at war with the idea of our government, antagonistic to true republicanism, and in every sense anti-American. The Catholic Church does not control its members. That Church prevents no crime. It is not in favor of education. It is not the friend of liberty. In Europe it is now used as a political power, but here it dare not assert itself. There are thousands of good Catholics. As a rule, they probably believe the creed of the Church. That Church has lost the power to anathematise. It can no longer burn. It must now depend upon other forces—upon persuasion, sophistry, ignorance, fear, and heredity.

“You have stated your objections to the Churches—what would you have to take their place?”

Of course there will always be meetings, occasions when people come together to exchange ideas, to hear what a man has to say upon some question, but the idea of going fifty-two days in a year to hear anybody upon the same subject is absurd.

“Would you include a man like Henry Ward Beecher in that statement?”

Beecher is interesting just in proportion that he is not orthodox, and he is altogether more interesting when talking against his creed. He delivered a sermon the other day in Chicago, in which he takes the ground that Christianity is kindness, and that, consequently, no one could be an infidel. Everyone believes in kindness, at least theoretically. In that sermon he throws away all creed and comes to the conclusion that Christianity is a life, not an aggregation of intellectual convictions upon certain subjects. The more sermons like that are preached probably the better. What I intended was the eternal repetition of the old story—that God made the world and a man, and then allowed the Devil to tempt him, and then thought of a

scheme of salvation, of vicarious atonement; fifteen hundred years afterwards drowned everybody except Noah and his family, and, afterwards, when he failed to civilise the Jewish people, came in person and suffered death, and announced the doctrine that all who believed on him would be saved, and those who did not, eternally lost. Now this story, with occasional references to the patriarchs and the New Jerusalem, and the exceeding heat of perdition, and the wonderful joys of paradise, is the average sermon, and this story is told again, again, and again by the same man, listened to by the same people, without any effect except to tire the speaker and the hearer. If all the ministers would take their texts from Shakespeare, if they would read every Sunday a selection from some of the great plays, the result would be infinitely better. They would all learn something; the mind would be enlarged, and the sermon would appear short. Nothing has shown more clearly the intellectual barrenness of the pulpit than the baccalaureate sermons lately delivered. The dignified dulness, the solemn stupidity of these addresses has never been excelled. No question was met. The poor candidates for the ministry were given no new weapons. Armed with the theological flintlock of a century ago, they were ordered to do battle for doctrines older than their weapons. They were told to rely on prayer, to answer all arguments by keeping out of discussions, and to overwhelm the sceptic by ignoring the facts. There was a time when the Protestant clergy were in favor of education; that is to say, education enough to make a Catholic a Protestant, but not enough to make a Protestant a philosopher. The Catholics are also in favor of education enough to make a savage a Catholic, and there they stop. The Christian should never unsettle his belief. If he studies, if he reads, he is in danger. A new idea is a doubt; a doubt is the threshold of infidelity. The young ministers are warned against inquiry. They are educated like robins; they swallow whatever is thrown in the mouth—worms or shingle-nails, it makes no difference—and they are expected to get their revenge by treating their flock

precisely as the professors treated them. The creeds of the Churches are being laughed at. Thousands of young men say nothing, because they do not wish to hurt the feelings of mothers and maiden aunts. Thousands of business men say nothing, for fear it may interfere with trade. Politicians keep silent for fear of losing influence. But when you get at the real opinions of the people, a vast majority have outgrown the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. Some people think these things good for women and children, and use the Lord as an immense policeman to keep order. Every day ministers are uttering a declaration of independence. They are being examined by synods and committees of ministers, and they are beginning everywhere to say that they do not regard this life as a probationary stage; that the doctrine of eternal punishment is too bad; that the Bible is, in many things, foolish, absurd, and infamous; that it must have been written by men. And the people at large are beginning to find that the ministers have kept back the facts; have not told the history of the Bible; have not given to their congregations the latest advices, and so the feeling is becoming almost general that orthodox Christianity has almost outlived its usefulness. The Church has a great deal to contend with. The scientific men are not religious. Geology laughs at Genesis, and astronomy has concluded that Joshua knew but very little of the motions of the heavenly bodies. Statesmen do not approve of the laws of Moses; the intellect of the world has got on the other side. There is something besides preaching on Sunday. The newspaper is the rival of the pulpit. Nearly all the cars are running on that blessed day. Steamers take hundreds of thousands of excursionists. The man who has been at work all the week seeks the sight of the sea, and this has become so universal that the preacher is following his example. The flock has ceased to be afraid of the wolf, and the shepherd deserts the sheep. In a little while all the libraries will be open—all the museums. There will be music in the public parks; the opera, the theatre. And what will the churches do then? The cardinal points will be demonstrated to

empty pews, unless the Church is wise enough to meet the intellectual demands of the present.

“You speak as if the influences working against Christianity to-day will tend to crush it out of existence. Do you think that Christianity is any worse off now than it was during the French Revolution, when the priests were banished from the country and Reason was worshipped; or, in England, a hundred years ago, when Hume, Bolingbroke, and others made their attacks upon it?”

You must remember that the French Revolution was produced by Catholicism; that it was a reaction; that it went to infinite extremes; that it was a revolution seeking revenge. It is not hard to understand those times provided you know the history of the Catholic Church. The seeds of the French Revolution were sown by priests and kings. The people had suffered the miseries of slavery for a thousand years, and the French Revolution came because human nature could bear the wrongs no longer. It was something not reasoned—it was *felt*. Only a few acted from intellectual convictions. The most were stung to madness, and were carried away with the desire to destroy. They wanted to shed blood, to tear down palaces, to cut throats, and in some way avenge the wrongs of all the centuries. Catholicism has never recovered—it never will. The dagger of Voltaire struck the heart; the wound was mortal. Catholicism has staggered from that day to this. It has been losing power every moment. At the death of Voltatre there were twenty million less Catholics than when he was born. In the French Revolution muscle outran mind, revenge anticipated reason. There was destruction, without the genius of construction. They had to use materials that had been rendered worthless by ages of Catholicism. The French Revolution was a failure, because the French people were a failure, and the French people were a failure because Catholicism had made them so. The ministers attack Voltaire without reading him. Probably there are not a dozen orthodox ministers in the world who have read the works of

Voltaire. I know of no one who has. Only a little while ago a minister told me he had read Voltaire. I offered him one hundred d dollars to repeat a paragraph, or to give the title even, of one of Voltaire's volumes. Most ministers think he was an Atheist. The trouble with the infidels of England a hundred years ago was that they did not go far enough. It may be that they could not have gone further and been allowed to live. Most of them took the ground that there was an infinite, all-wise, beneficent God, creator of the universe, and that this all-wise, beneficent God certainly was too good to be the author of the Bible. They, however, insisted that this good God was the author of nature, and the theologians completely turned the tables by showing that this God of nature was as bad as the God of the Bible; that this God of nature was in the pestilence and plague business, manufactured earthquakes, overwhelmed towns and cities, and was, of necessity, the author of all pain and agony. In my judgment, the Deists were all successfully answered. The God of nature is certainly as bad as the God of the Old Testament. It is only when we discard the idea of a deity, the idea of cruelty or goodness in nature, that we are able even to bear with patience the ills of life. I feel that I am neither a favorite nor a victim. Nature neither loves nor hates me. I do not believe in the existence of any personal God. I regard the universe as the one fact, as the one existence—that is, as the absolute thing. I am part of this. I do not say that there is no God; I simply say I do not believe there is. There may be millions of them. Neither do I say that man is not immortal. Upon that point I admit that I do not know, and the declarations of all the priests in the world upon that subject give me no light, and do not even tend to add to my information on the subject, because I know that they don't know. The infidelity of a hundred years ago knew nothing, comparatively speaking, of geology, nothing of astronomy, nothing of the ideas of Lamarck and Darwin, nothing of evolution, nothing, comparatively speaking, of other religions, nothing of India, that womb of metaphysics; in other words, the infidels of a hundred years ago

knew the creed of orthodox Christianity to be false, but had not the facts to demonstrate it. The infidels of to-day have the facts. That is the difference. A hundred years ago it was a guessing prophecy—to-day it is the fact and fulfilment. Everything in nature is working against superstition to-day. Superstition is like a thorn in the flesh, and everything, from dust to stars, is working together to destroy the false. The smallest pebble answers the greatest parson. One blade of grass, rightly understood, destroys the orthodox creed.

“You say the pews will be empty in the future until the Church meets the intellectual demands of the present. Are not the ministers of to-day, generally speaking, much more intellectual than those of a hundred years ago, and are not the ‘Liberal’ views in regard to the inspiration of the Bible, the atonement, future punishment, the fall of man, and the personal divinity of Christ which openly prevail in many churches, an indication that the Church *is* meeting the demands of many people who do not care to be classed as out-and-out disbelievers in Christianity, but who have advanced views on those and other questions?”

The views of the Church are changing, the clergy of Brooklyn to the contrary notwithstanding. Orthodox religion is a kind of boa-constrictor; anything it can't dodge it will swallow. The Church is bound to have something for sale that somebody wants to buy. According to the pew demand will be the pulpit supply. In old times the pulpit dictated to the pews. Things have changed. Theology is now run on business principles. The gentleman who pays for the theories insists on having them suit him. Ministers are intellectual gardeners, and they must supply the market with such religious vegetables as the congregation desire. Thousands have given up belief in the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the atonement idea, and original sin. Millions believe now that this is not a state of probation; that a man, provided he is well off, and has given liberally to the church, or whose wife has been a regular

attendant, will, in the next world, have another chance; that he will be permitted to file a motion for a new trial. Others think that hell is not so warm as it used to be supposed; that, while it is very hot in the middle of the day, the nights are cool; and that, after all, there isn't so much to fear from the future. They regard the old religion as very good for the poor, and they give them the old ideas on the same principle that they give them their old clothes. These ideas, out at the elbows, out at the knees, buttons off, somewhat ravelled, will, after all, do very well for paupers. There is a great trade of this kind going on now—selling old theological clothes to the colored people in the South. All I have said applies to all Churches. The Catholic Church changes every day. It does not change its ceremonies; but the spirit that begot the ceremonies, the spirit that clothed the skeleton of ceremony with the white flesh and blood and throb of life and love, is gone. The spirit that built the cathedrals, the spirit that emptied the wealth of the world into the lap of Rome, has turned in another direction. Of course the Churches are all going to endeavor to meet the demands of the hour. They will find new readings for old texts. They will re-punctuate and re-parse the Old Testament. They will find that "flat" meant "a little rounding"; that "six days" meant "six long times"; that the word "flood" should have been translated "dampness," "dew," or "threatened rain"; that Daniel in the lion's den was an historical myth; that Samson and his foxes had nothing to do with this world. All these things will be gradually explained and made to harmonise with the facts of modern science. They will not change the words of the creed; they will simply give new meanings; and the highest criticism to-day is that which confuses and avoids. In other words, the Churches will change as the people change. They will keep for sale that which can be sold. Already the old goods are being "marked down." If, however, the Church should fall, why then it must go. I see no reason, myself, for its existence. It apparently does no good; it devours without producing; it eats without planting, and is a

perpetual burden. It teaches nothing of value. It misleads, mystifies, and misrepresents. It threatens without knowledge and promises without power. In my judgment, the quicker it goes the better for all mankind. But if it does not go in name, it must go in fact, because it must change; and therefore it is only a question of time when it ceases to divert from useful channels the blood and muscle of the world.

“You say that in the baccalaureate sermons delivered lately the theological students were told to answer arguments by keeping out of discussion. Is it not the fact that ministers have, of late years, preached very largely on scientific disbelief, Agnosticism, and infidelity, so much as to lead to their being reprimanded by some of their more conservative brethren?”

Of course, there are hundreds and thousands of ministers perpetually endeavoring to answer infidelity. Their answers have done so much harm that the more conservative among the clergy have advised them to stop. Thousands have answered me, and their answers, for the most part, are like this: Paine was a black-guard, therefore the geology of Genesis is on a scientific basis. We know the doctrine of the atonement is true, because in the French Revolution they worshipped Reason. And we know, too, all about the fall of man and the Garden of Eden, because Voltaire was nearly frightened to death when he came to die. These are the usual arguments, supplemented by a few words concerning myself. And, in my view, they are the best that can be made. Failing to answer a man's argument, the next thing is to attack his character. “You have no case,” said an attorney to the plaintiff. “No matter,” said the plaintiff, “I want you to give the defendant the devil.”

“What have you to say to the Rev. Dr. Baker's statement that he generally buys five or six tickets for your lectures and gives them to young men, who are shocked at the flippant way in which you are said to speak of the Bible?”

Well, as to that, I have always wondered why I had such immense audiences in Brooklyn and New York. This tends to clear away the mystery. If all the clergy follow the example of Dr. Baker, that accounts for the number seeking admission. Of course, Dr. Baker would not misrepresent a thing like that, and I shall always feel greatly indebted to him, shall hereafter regard him as one of my agents, and take this occasion to return my thanks. He is certainly welcome to all the converts to Christianity made by hearing me. Still, I hardly think it honest in the young men to play a game like that on the doctor.

“You speak of the eternal repetition of the old story of Christianity, and say that the more sermons like the one Mr. Beecher preached lately the better. Is it not the fact that ministers, at the present time, do preach very largely on questions of purely moral, social, and humanitarian interest, so much so, indeed, as to provoke criticisms on the part of the secular newspaper press?”

I admit that there is a general tendency in the pulpit to preach about things happening in this world; in other words, that the preachers themselves are beginning to be touched by “worldliness.” They find that the New Jerusalem has no particular interest for persons dealing in real estate in this world. And thousands of people are losing interest in Abraham, David, Haggai, and take more interest in gentlemen who have the cheerful habit of living. They also find that their readers do not wish to be reminded perpetually of death and coffins, and worms, and dust, and grave-stones, and shrouds, and epitaphs, and hearses, biers, and cheerful subjects of that character. That they prefer to hear the minister speak about a topic in which they have a present interest, and about which something cheerful can be said. In fact, it is a relief to hear about politics, a little about art, something about stocks or the crops, and most ministers find it necessary to advertise that they are going to speak on something that has happened within the last eighteen hundred years, and that for the time being, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego will be left in the

furnace. Of course I think that most ministers are reasonably honest. Maybe they don't tell all their doubts, but undoubtedly they are endeavoring to make the world better, and most of the church-members think that they are doing the best that can be done. I am not criticising their motives, but their methods. I am not attacking the character or reputation of ministers, but simply giving my ideas, avoiding anything personal. I do not pretend to be very good, nor very bad—just fair to middling.

“You say that Christians will not read for fear that they will unsettle their beliefs. Father Fransiola (Roman Catholic) said in the interview I had with him: ‘If you do not allow man to reason you crush his manhood. Therefore, he has to reason upon the credibility of his faith, and through reason, guided by faith, he discovers the truth, and so satisfies his wants?’”

“Without calling in question the perfect sincerity of Father Fransiola, I think his statement is exactly the wrong end to. I do not think that reason should be guided by faith; I think that faith should be guided by reason. After all, the highest possible conception of faith would be the science of probabilities, and the probable must not be based on what has not happened, but upon what has; not upon something we know nothing about, but the nature of the things with which we are acquainted. The foundation we must know something about, and whenever we reason we must have something as a basis, something secular, something that we think we know. About these facts we reason, sometimes by analogy, and we say so and so has happened, therefore so and so may happen. We don't say so and so *may* happen, therefore something else *has* happened. We must reason from the known to the unknown, not from the unknown to the known. This father admits that if you don't allow a man to reason you crush his manhood. At the same time he says faith must govern reason. Who makes the faith? The Church. And the Church tells the man that he must take the faith, reason or no reason, and that he may afterwards reason, taking the faith as a

fact. This makes him an intellectual slave, and the poor devil mistakes for liberty the right to examine his own chains. These gentlemen endeavor to satisfy their prisoners by insisting that there is nothing beyond the walls.

—“ You criticise the Church for not encouraging the poor to mingle with the rich, and yet you defend the right of a man to choose his own company. Are not these same distinctions made by non-professing Christians in real life, and will there always be some greater, richer, wiser than the rest ? ”

I do not blame the Church because there are these distinctions based on wealth, intelligence, and culture. What I blame the Church for is pretending to do away with these distinctions. These distinctions in men are inherent ; differences in brain, in race, in blood, in education, and they are differences that will externally exist—that is, as long as the human race exists. Some will be fortunate, some unfortunate, some generous, some stingy, some rich, some poor. What I wish to do away with is the contempt, and scorn, and hatred existing between rich and poor. I want the democracy of kindness—what you might call the republicanism of justice. I do not have to associate with a man to keep from robbing him. I can give him his rights without enjoying his company, and he can give me my rights without inviting me to dinner. Why should not poverty have rights ? And has not honest poverty the right to hold dishonest wealth in contempt, and will it not do it, whether it belongs to the same Church or not ? We cannot judge men by their wealth, nor by the position they hold in society. I like every kind man ; I hate every cruel one. I like the generous, whether they are poor or rich, ignorant or cultivated. I like men that love their families, that are kind to their wives, gentle with their children, no matter whether they are millionaires or mendicants. And to me the blossom of benevolence, of charity, is the fairest flower, no matter whether it blooms by the side of a hovel or bursts from a vine climbing the marble pillar of a palace. I respect no

man because he is rich ; I hold in contempt no man because he is poor.

“Some of the clergymen say that the spread of infidelity is greatly exaggerated ; that it makes more noise and creates more notice than conservative Christianity simply on account of its being outside of the accepted line of thought.”

There was a time when an unbeliever, open and pronounced, was a wonder. At that time the Church had great power ; it could retaliate, it could destroy. The Church abandoned the stake only when too many men objected to being burnt. At that time infidelity was clad not simply in novelty, but often in fire. Of late years the thoughts of men have been turned, by virtue of modern discoveries, as the result of countless influences, to an investigation of the foundation of orthodox religion. Other religions were put in the crucible of criticism, and nothing was found but dross. At last it occurred to the intelligent to examine our own religion, and this examination has excited great interest and great comment. People want to hear, and they want to hear because they have already about concluded themselves that the creeds are founded in error. Thousands come to hear me because they are interested in the question, because they want to hear a man say what they think. They want to hear their own ideas from the lips of another. The tide has turned, and the spirit of investigation, the intelligence, the intellectual courage of the world, is on the other side. A real good old-fashioned orthodox minister who believes in the Thirty-nine Articles with all his might is regarded to-day as a theological mummy, a kind of corpse acted upon by the galvanic battery of faith, making strange motions, almost like those of life—not quite,

We need no inspiration, no inspired work. The industrious man knows that the idle has no right to rob him of the product of his labor, and the idle man knows that he has no right to it. It is not wrong because we find it in the Bible, but I presume it was put in the Bible because it is wrong. Then you find

in the Bible other things upheld that are infamous. And why? Because the writers of the Bible were barbarians in many things, and because that book is a mixture of good and evil. I see no trouble in teaching morality without miracle. I see no use of miracle. What can men do with it? Credulity is not a virtue. The credulous are not necessarily charitable. Wonder is not the mother of wisdom. I believe children should be taught to investigate and to reason for themselves, and that there are facts enough to furnish a foundation for all human virtue. We will take two families; in the one, the father and mother are both Christians, and they teach their children the creed; teach them that they are naturally totally depraved; that they can only hope for happiness in a future life by pleading the virtues of another, and that a certain belief is necessary to salvation; that God punishes his children for ever. Such a home has a certain atmosphere. Take another family: the father and mother teach their children that they should be kind to each other because kindness produces happiness; that they should be gentle; that they should be just, because justice is the mother of joy. And suppose this father and mother say to their children—If you are happy, it must be as a result of your own actions; if you do wrong, you must suffer the consequences. No Christ can redeem you; no Savior can suffer for you. You must suffer the consequences of your own misdeeds. If you plant, you must reap; and you must reap what you plant. And suppose these parents also to say—“You must find out the conditions of happiness. You must investigate the circumstances by which you are surrounded. You must ascertain the nature and relation of things so that you can act in accordance with known facts, to the end that you may have health and peace.” In such a family there would be a certain atmosphere, in my judgment, a thousand times better, and purer, and sweeter than in the other. The Church generally teaches that rascality pays in this world, but not in the next; that here virtue is a losing game, but the dividends will be large in another world. They tell the people that they must serve God

on credit, but the Devil pays cash here. That is not my doctrine. My doctrine is that a thing is right because it pays, in the highest sense. That is the reason it is right. The reason a thing is wrong is because it is the mother of misery. Virtue has its reward here and now. It means health ; it means intelligence, contentment, success. Vice means exactly the opposite. Most of us have more passion than judgment, carry more sail than ballast, and by the tempest of passion we are blown from port, we are wrecked and lost. We cannot be saved by faith, nor by belief. It is a slower process ; we must be saved by knowledge, by intelligence,—the only lever capable of raising mankind.

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